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Ashley McConnell

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Finding Hope in my Miscarriage

Where do I begin reliving and expressing the most dreadful thing that has ever happen to me? Emotional and physical pain, fear of the unknown, helplessness, guilt, shame, were words to best describe how I felt when the time I knew my unborn child did not have a heartbeat. The world suddenly caved in on me. The thought of my child inside my body was lifeless, just floating in there in my belly. When just a few weeks prior I saw the flickering little heart beating away.

It all began when my husband and I were invited to birthday party celebration, which required a babysitter for the night. It has been a long time since my husband, and I spent alone time together. We felt like teenagers, young and free, going out on a date. It took me almost two hours to get ready for the special night. I carefully shaved my legs and armpits, getting every black hair that covered my smooth white skin for almost a month. To bathe I used the scented soap that made me smell like a fruity tropical drink. My husband loves when I use that soap. My shampoo and lotion smelled of coconut. I even blow dried and straightened my hair so that he could run his fingers through my hair later that night after a few drinks. The party involved lots of dancing, drinking, and touching. Something my husband and I have not experienced in over a year. We sensed a high of feeling young again. That is the feeling before marriage and kids, which consists of stress, fear, anxiety, and emotional pain. However, it seems to be a reoccurring thing in my life that when I throw down Red Bull and vodkas and

escape reality, I put on my wings and fly high. Flying high also came at a high price. We were careless and irresponsible.

It was not a surprise when I found out that I was expecting with my fourth child. After having three boys, we were hoping for a girl. To think I could have a daughter and replicate the mother daughter relationship that I hold close to my heart with my own mother, would be endearing. My mother and I hold a special bond, unlike with my older two brothers and sister who treat her as if she were a nuisance to their so important lives. We are best friends and that is what I hoped for from this pregnancy. Yet, the weeks ahead were unseen and unpredictable.

It was at my first prenatal appointment when I could see the little bundle on screen. Seven weeks could have not come any sooner. I knew how these things go. Nurse brings you back to the cold and sterile room and asks for a sample. When the pregnancy test was confirmed, I began to undress and change into a gown, and not the wedding dress type. Uncertainty was filling my mind. Will the baby be in there? Is she developing okay? Is there a heartbeat? All questions with answers could not have come any sooner. I was sitting up on the adjustable table with my legs open and feet supported by stirrups which remind me of long metal ice cream scoopers. My husband is with me and holding my hand. Poor guy never misses baby appointments. At this point, while waiting for the doctor to come into the room I was envisioning the heartbeat on the monitor and both of us crying with tears of joy. It was, however, an unusual appointment. Dr. Touey came in and welcomed us back after a year from giving birth to my third son. We were delighted to see each other. That was until the internal ultrasound wand was invading my uterus. At least he found what we were looking for, which was in my eyes a precious little blob for a human and a twinkling little heart beating away.

From this point, I was excited to start my fourth pregnancy journey. However, in order to start the journey, I knew certain things would be compromised.

It was almost spring of 2019. I was working as an assistant teacher within a Kindergarten classroom at a private early education center for the 2018-2019 school year. I was under the impression that the Kindergarten program would not continue the following year, which put my current position into a standstill. Keeping this in mind, I just found out that I was pregnant with my fourth child. I was on the fence whether to tell my employer about my pregnancy, but I also did not want it to come as a surprise to them. Since I knew my pregnancy may impact my position at work, I thought it was best to tell them. So, I did. At ten weeks pregnant I let my director know that I was expecting again. The reaction I got was not a good one. In her insensitive and cold voice, she said, "What? Again? Four kids? Oh my God, how are you going to manage all of this?" My response was, "I don't know", and I started to cry. I am not sure why I let her think I could not manage it. Then I started to have doubts about whether I was going to be able to handle another child. Soon after, plenty of co-workers knew of my pregnancy and pretended to be excited for me, but I could feel the uncertainty they had for me to take on another child while working full-time. At this point, I was not sure if having another child was a wonderful idea and my feelings about bringing another life into this world began to alter. I knew I could not go back and change the circumstance, where my belief is everything happens for a reason. I believed God had a plan for me and I trusted his plan. The stress grew over the next couple of weeks, but I was looking at the brighter side of things. I was having a child, a heaven-sent miracle.

Springtime was near, and the school year was coming to an end. I was stressed about the uncertainty of whether I would have a job when the new school year begins. And now that I was pregnant, they began treating me differently and left me feeling that they no longer wanted me. It was just a week before my kindergarten classes graduation when I was let go. I was hurt. I had been planning this graduation ceremony for weeks and now I could not be a part of it. But what hurt the most, was not being able to see my students graduate. I was upset about losing my job, but with everything else going on, I did not have time to let it get me down. I had another ultrasound appointment coming up, and I wanted to see my baby.

The day came when I would finally get the chance to hear my baby's heartbeat. My husband had since then, picked up a second job and had to work during my appointment. I was on my own this time. It was the first time my husband did not come with me to a prenatal appointment. I was anxious but still excited to listen to my unborn child's beating heart for the very first time. It was the Dr. Rosalie this time. I pulled my shirt up to right underneath my bra. She placed the warm jelly on my belly and used the heart monitor to detect the baby's heart. It took longer than usual. Even though Dr. Rosalie made me feel comfortable and at ease it was difficult to hear her say, "We will try for another few minutes." I knew at that point something could be wrong. I was scheduled for an ultrasound the following day.

My husband took off work to be with me, and my mother had the kids at home. Best wishes were sent from each of our families, that a heartbeat would be there. My husband and I drove to the outpatient center together. It was a silent car ride and the wheels in my head were turning with negative and depressing thoughts. From this point it was already in my head that this baby was not alive. Sitting in the waiting room, my name was next to be called. I did

not want to go in and face reality. It felt like an eternity sitting there. My warm and swollen hand was embraced with my husband's cold and sweaty hand, which meant nerves for the both of us. The ultrasound tech came to the door. "Ashley? Come on back." Communication between the three of us was limited. There was more silence, just like the car ride on the way over. I was on the table with my belly exposed again for the second time this week. As I looked on the screen in the dark lit room, I saw the blob just motionlessly sitting in my womb. The color detection was not showing red or blue colors which meant blood flow. The ultrasound tech did not say a word, which verified our feelings. I could tell by the look on the techs face that it was not a good sign. It almost seemed as though she wanted me to see her body language as she conducted the ultrasound. She was not permitted to give me an answer, but my husband and I both knew ultimately what the answer was. We started sobbing. We were escorted back into the waiting room until we could hear back from the doctor to confirm. Sure enough, my child was pronounced dead on June 4th, 2019.

The fetus was no longer my precious gift, and she was gone just like that at thirteen weeks. It was not a silent drive home. I still relive this moment and can internalize the emotion and pain that I felt as soon after I got my answer. Tears were falling from my face, snot was running out of my nose, and as soon as we drove out of the outpatient center parking lot, I let it all out. I sounded like a girl from a horror film right before she is caught and murdered. My husband was usually compassionate and there to comfort me, but he never experienced this emotional reaction from me within the time we were together. We both could not process our emotions. After the shock of it all, I was numb and would not want to feel a thing. Nothing

mattered at this time, not even my breathing children. It sounds horrible, but I was grieving and felt I could not take care of my own children.

Where did it all go wrong? What did I do to cause this? It is an ongoing battle within myself, where I am to blame for losing my future best friend. I did not take my prenatal vitamins, I drank more than a cup of caffeine on the daily, I had a glass of wine here and there, I carried laundry up and down the stairs, I dyed my hair, and I took antidepressants. It was my fault and now I must live with the result. Until this day I grieve for my unborn child, but I am in a much better place now.

After weeks of feeling like I did not have a purpose, my relationship with my husband became strained. We stopped communicating with each other, we lost that spark that we once had. He buried himself in his two jobs and I turned to drinking. We were miserable and I was contemplating divorce. It was at that point that I started going out more instead of staying home with my family. This frustrated my husband, but at that time, my feelings were more important than his. I wanted to be away from them and my responsibilities. I ended up one night, going out with my sister in-law and having too many drinks. I flirted with a guy and he eventually ended up sitting with us. I expressed to him that I was not happy with my marriage and was ready to leave my husband. I knew what I was doing was wrong, but I did not care. I was free, at least for the night. Free from marriage and kids and I just wanted to let go for a little. Anyways, the drinks kept coming and it was not before long that the guy who I was sitting with, offered me a ride. I knew I shouldn't, but I got in the car, he expressed to me that he wanted me to go home with him. I instantly realized that this was not what I really wanted, I got out of the car and went back to my sister in-law. We went home and I explained to my

husband what happened that night. He was upset, but this acted as a wakeup call for us both. We decided to go to couple's therapy and work on saving our marriage. It took time, but eventually we found that spark that we had lost. Along the way I turned to prayer and asked God to guide me and protect my family. I was getting back on track.

Before the summer ended, I decided to go back to school. Before I met my husband, it was my goal to finish college and get into a career that would be meaningful and purposeful. With losing my job in Spring 2019 and then shortly after, miscarrying, there had to be a reason for this all. I had a strong pull on my heart to pursue my goals and become a certified teacher. This could have been because I needed to fill the void of losing a child, but either way I was determined and focused to make a change.

Now I am sitting here writing this narrative for a college course that I need to complete so that I graduate. I am in my fourth semester and plan on graduating soon with a degree in Special Education. I am doing it! In my heart I believe my unborn child saved me and my family, and I know I will meet HER after this life. And yes, it was confirmed. After the fetus was removed from my womb, it was sent out to a lab to reveal the gender. Now "it" does not exist. I named her Ruby and she will always be apart of our family.